

WESTMINSTER-ABBEY:

A N

E L E G I A C P O E M,

B Y T H E

Rev^d THOMAS MAURICE, A.B.

Of UNIVERSITY-COLLEGE, OXFORD.

"The Paths of Glory lead but to the Grave!"

GRATE.

L O N D O N:

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RIGHT REVEREND FATHER IN GOD,

JOHN, LORD BISHOP OF ROCHESTER,

DEAN OF WESTMINSTER,

AND OF THE MOST HONOURABLE ORDER OF THE BATH,

THE FOLLOWING PAGES ARE RESPECTFULLY INSCRIBED,

BY HIS LORDSHIP'S MOST OBLIGED,

OBEDEDIENT HUMBLE SERVANT,

THOMAS MAURICE.

WOODFORD, MAY 1, 1784.

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P R E F A C E.

PRODIGY and fable are so intimately blended with whatever was magnificent and stupendous under the Romish Superstition, that we must not wonder if the foundation of so august and celebrated an edifice, as WESTMINSTER-ABBEY, be attributed to supernatural aid, and its consecration attended with peculiar and distinguished miracles. Accordingly we are informed in monkish legends, that St. Peter himself descended at its solemnization; a grand chorus of celestial music joined in the awful ceremony; while the radiant glories of heaven illumined the fabric.

To descend however from fable to reality, it was originally founded about the year 600, by one of the first Saxon kings upon the ruins of an ancient temple, said to be dedicated to Apollo. On the invasion of the Danes it became the object of sacrilegious fury; but its decaying splendour was revived, first by Edgar, and afterwards by Edward the Confessor,

Confessor, who pulled down the old church, and caused a new and most magnificent one for that age to be raised in its stead, in the form of a cross. He confirmed all the old charters in its favour; he granted a new one with more ample privileges and more liberal endowments; he caused it to be signed by all the nobility and dignified clergy of the realm, in a general convention holden for that purpose; and he closed the whole by a solemn deed, fraught with the most tremendous imprecations upon all such as should infringe it. Two centuries after, a partial decay having taken place, the repair of this Abbey on an extended scale was begun by Henry the 3d. who did not live to complete the design he had engaged in. Amidst the bloody and tumultuous wars between the Houses of York and Lancaster, when all the works of science and genius throughout the kingdom were at a stand, it was indebted for its improvements, during this gloomy interval, to the private munificence of the several monks and abbots who successively enjoyed its revenues.

To Henry the seventh Westminster-Abbey owed the completion of its grandeur, by his erecting that beautiful pile of Gothic architecture which bears his name, and is justly esteemed its greatest ornament. The rose of Lancaster is still visible on many parts of the building, and his monument of solid brais in the center of the chapel, so nobly gilt, and exquisitely wrought, as to have been the admiration of ages, has given him that kind of immortality which his vanity seemed to aim at. His son and successor however paid little regard to the object of his father's ambition, by suffering it to be plundered of many inestimable

inestimable treasures ; and in the unhappy civil wars, when the ancient and venerable beauty of all the religious houses in the kingdom was wantonly defaced, this Abbey became once more the plunder of an enraged and sacrilegious banditti. At length, towards the conclusion of the last century, a general and complete repair of this august edifice, at the national expence, was thought absolutely necessary to save it from falling into total ruin. This great work was undertaken by Sir Christopher Wren with equal vigour and ability, and has since been nearly finished according to the plan laid down by that celebrated Architect. The south side has been new cased with a more durable kind of stone than that which formerly invested it, and by the injuries of time and weather, was in many places decayed to a considerable depth : two very stately towers have been added to strengthen the building, not inferior in point of workmanship and majesty to any part of the ancient structure ; and the choir has lately been adorned with new stalls and seats, in a stile corresponding with the internal part of the Fabric.

Thus much was thought necessary to be said to gratify the curiosity of the reader, as he will find the following pages allude to more important considerations than those which regard the external history of this sacred repository of the dead. In so large a survey as was here offered to the Author, where History, Politics, and Poetry opened a wide field for investigation, it was hardly possible to descend to minute allusion and particular description. He professes to be THE MONITOR, not THE GUIDE of the reader. Not anxious to make distinctions, where Distinction it-

self

self is no more, he wrote as the ideas rose in his mind, with little regard to method and with less apprehension of censure. If he should be fortunate enough to impress some kindred mind with those serious reflections on reading, that strongly suggested themselves to him on writing, the ensuing stanzas, his end will be answered and his ambition sufficiently gratified.

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WESTMINSTER-ABBEY.

MAJESTIC monument of pious toil,

Whose tow'rs sublime in Gothic grandeur soar,

Where Death sits brooding o'er his noblest spoil,

And strews with royal dust the sacred floor,

Unfold thy gloomy portals to my song —

Ye dusky isles, ye lonely cloisters hail !

Come, Inspiration, lead my steps along,

And all the secrets of the grave unveil.

Nor, Cynthia, thou thy glimmering fires deny

To gild the horrors of this dreadful gloom ;

Where the night-phantom, swiftly gliding by,

Shoots o'er my path, and beckons to its tomb.

Now Darkness, shadowing wide the silent earth,
 Bids vice unmask and stalk her nightly round;
 Now frantic Bacchanals renew their mirth,
 While Commerce rests in golden slumbers bound.

Now Dissipation drives her whirling car
 In courts to shine, or flaunt in masquerade;
 Her blazing torches glitter from afar,
 And pour meridian day on midnight's shade.

Hence Greatness with thy toys—thy stars, thy strings,
 The jewell'd scepter and imperial crown;
 My soul superior views the pride of kings,
 And on the bright parade of courts looks down.

The glittering spoils that round ambition blaze,
 The trophied arch, the golden canopy,
 The plume resplendent with the diamond's rays,
 The shout of millions echoing to the sky,

For the deep silence of the Grave I spurn—
 And quit the living pageant for the dead:
 Mine be the *plume* that shades yon fable urn,
 While death's dark *canopy* inshrouds my head.

Hark !

Hark ! how the hollow blast with savage ~~wail~~^{and}
 Roars 'midst the turrets of the rocking pile ;
 While in deep notes, responsive to the gale,
 The slow bell labours thro' the length'ning aisle.

Awe-struck I kneel—and kiss the hallow'd ground,
 Where Britain's laurel'd progeny repose,
 Whose hearts no more with martial transports bound,
 Nor their hot blood with patriot ardour glows.

Ye monarchs of the earth, attend your doom,
 And throw awhile the rich tiara by :
 Come, mourn with me at mighty HENRY's tomb,
 And heed a monitor that cannot lie!

Approach, nor tremble while your steps descend
 To charnel'd caverns—grandeur's last abode !
 From mould'ring majesty its trappings rend,
 And view the worm its regal spoil confide.

Come, haughty Bourbon, to the Gods allied,
 Renounce the vaunt, and know thyself a man :
 Mark yonder bier, sad bound of human pride,
 And view an empire quitted for a spåns.

Come, hoary Frederic, that drear bourn survey
 To which thy footsteps rapidly incline :
 Mark Henry's laurels—thus shall thine decay ;
 Tho' thy bright brow a double * wreath intwine.

Ye mighty Shadows rise ; confirm my strains ;
 Rise thou whom Agincourt triumphant view'd :
 What but a shroud of all your pomp remains,
 Of plunder'd nations, and a world subdued ?

Sapp'd by the ravage of devouring Time,
 O'er sainted EDWARD's shrine, Devotion, mourn ;
 Once deck'd with treasures brought from ev'ry clime,
 And crowns from brows of vanquish'd monarchs torn.

Here York and Lancaster are foes no more,
 But on the same cold marble bed repose :
 Their idle contest for dominion's o'er,
 While Death's strong grasp cements each rival rose.

The Baron, haughty, jealous, fierce of soul,
 Reserved in council, dauntless in the field,
 Who

* The double wreath of Mars and the Muses ; see the Ode to Death, written by the King of Prussia, and translated into English with great elegance and Spirit by Sir James Marriot.

Who scarcely brook'd a monarch's high controul,
To the GREAT CONQU'ROR is compell'd to yield.

The ponderous helmet and the massy spear,
Hung o'er his tomb, their master's prowess show,
Who frowns above in breathing brass severe,
And bears defiance on his lofty brow.

Wealth, power, ambition, where are fled those charms,
Whose sway resistless binds our hapless race?

Ye that so often rouze the world to arms,
And shake contending kingdoms to their base.

Where is the breathing glow of Beauty fled,
That once the soul of rival warriors fired ;
The sparkling eye, the cheek with crimson spread,
The air—the shape—by crowded courts admired !

For here full many a beauteous maid reclines,
For matchless worth and constancy approv'd ;
And many a noble dame yon vault inshrines,
From kings descended and by kings beloved.

Eternal peace to * Mary's injur'd shade—
 In life defam'd, in death with glory crown'd;
 Securely slumber, near thy rival laid:
 Beyond the grave her vengeance cannot wound.

Too stern Eliza, why that sanguine deed
 Which a deep shade o'er all thy glory throws;
 And cou'd thy soften'd heart for Essex bleed,
 Nor melt with anguish at a sister's woes?

But for this blot—yon center'd sun ne'er view'd
 A throne with more triumphant splendor fill'd,
 Each foreign rival by thy pow'r subdu'd,
 Domestic faction by thy wisdom still'd!

What potent song shall utter half thy praise?
 Let Europe's annals tell the wond'rous tale—
 Let freed Batavia songs of triumph raise,
 Let Spain her wreck'd Invincible bewail.

Here,

* Mary Queen of Scots. Though the labours of some late Historians have not been entirely successful in their endeavours to wipe away every reproach from the memory of this unfortunate Queen; yet it is universally acknowledged by all parties that she met the fate to which she was doomed with the firmness of an heroine, and the resignation of a martyr.

Here, * Percy, as I cast my eyes around,
 Lost in the blaze of titles and of birth;
 Who more than thee for high descent renown'd?
 Who more enabled by intrinsic worth?

What marbles can—yon sculptur'd shrine displays,
 The lofty trophy of a husband's love;
 Yet monuments but meanly speak her praise
 Whom envy must applaud, and vice approve.

While, Britain, o'er thy shrouded sons I tread,
 What awful terror does the thought excite;
 While all thy virtuous, fam'd, and noble dead
 Start from the shades, and sweep before my sight.

Thy bearded senators of high renown,
 Who firm in virtue's, hold in freedom's cause,
 Taught distant states to tremble at their frown,
 And gave the sovereigns of the world new laws;

All whom the proud, historic page proclaims,
 For wisdom, fortitude, and worth rever'd,
 Thy Howard's, Russel's, Sidney's—mighty names!
 Thro' ages still to patriot breasts endear'd,

Cold.

* The late Duchess of Northumberland.

Cold, speechless, pale, beneath these roofs recline,
Trampled by slaves, by loathsome reptiles spurn'd;
Silent the tongue so fondly deem'd *divine*,
The head that counsel'd, and the heart that burn'd.

Where are the fires that flash'd from Chatham's eye,
The strains that from those lips impetuous broke;
When, warm'd by truth, and rouz'd by liberty,
His thundering voice th' astonish'd senate shook?

By Bacon's genius with new life inform'd,
Again the bold, expressive features glow;
The patriot kindles, by the sculpture warm'd,
While fancy hears his manly periods flow.

Here too thy warriors, who, from age to age,
Have spread thy fame thro' all th' astonish'd world,
Pointed beneath the line thy awful rage,
Or at the distant pole thy vengeance hurl'd,

Have nerveless dropt that spear, whose light'ning ray
Wither'd the Tyrant's lifted arm in fight;
Pour'd on the dungeon slave resoluteless day,
And bade him rise in freedom's sacred light.

Where

Where hath not glory wafted VERNON's name?

Where WAGER, WARREN—are your deeds unsung?

Where CHURCHILL, TOWNSHEND—eldest sons of fame,

And WOLFE, the theme of ev'ry Briton's tongue? H

Immortal spirit of the dauntless Howe,

Whose triumphs made the western world our own;

Well may'st thou tear the laurels from thy brow,

To see thy dear earn'd victories o'erthrown. I

Curst civil rage—to glut thy thirsty spear,

Insatiate fiend, lamented ANDRE bled:

In life's gay morn, in glory's full career,

Low to the Grave descends his youthful head.

His fate, with anguish, smote the royal breast,

Where worth and valour ever finds a friend;

The starting tear the monarch's grief confess'd,

Who bade yon marble to his name ascend.

Where is the master of the various string,

That all the soul's suspended pow'r's controul'd;

Or bade it mount upon the seraph's wing,

Rapt fancy madd'ning as the measures roll'd?

O D E,

Sacred to the GENIUS of

H AND A N D E L.

O ! blest with more than mortal fire,
 Thou who th~~e~~ chords with sacred fury smote,
 And drew a louder and diviner note
 Than e'er resounded from the lyre,
 Tho' thy bold Genius, ranging unconfined,
 Enjoys at length that nobler harmony
 For which on earth thy soul impatient pined,
 Look down, great HANDEL, from thy native sky,
 Where, kindling at thy song, Archangels glow ;
 Nor, while thou lead'st a brighter band on high,
 Disdain to mingle with the choirs below.

II.

With ardent zeal to celebrate thy Name,
 And glowing with thy own immortal flame,

To

To this famed Fabric an entraptur'd train
 From many a distant clime their footsteps bend :
 Blest spirit from the realms of day descend,
 And, while the swelling pæans round thee rise,
 And loud and deep ascends the choral strain ;
 Forget the loftier airs of Paradise,
 And deign to smite an earthly lyre again :
 O'er mortal breasts resumie thy wonted sway,
 And all the wond'rous pow'rs of song display.

III.

Oh ! for that energy sublime,
 Which thro' thy music's bold, inspiring page,
 Roll'd with the torrents over-whelming rage,
 To animate this meaner rhyme —
 Then, in a strain exalted as thine own,
 Should the transported muse thy praise recite ;
 With thy freed spirit take her rapid flight,
 And urge her way to heav'n's eternal throne,
 To hear that high, unutterable song,
 Which thou, and the triumphant fons of light,
 Thro' all Eternity's bright day prolong !

IV.

From thee new rage the British Genius caught,

New rapture wing'd the Poet's soaring thought :

Charm'd with the noble wildness of thy lyre,

From his bright sphere astonish'd DRYDEN bends,

Owes thy bold song his loftiest flight transcends,

And learns to glow with more exalted fire.

With all thy warm, energetic fancy fraught,

The mighty soul of MILTON smiles to see

Its vast conceptions realiz'd in thee :

The nine-fold harmony he sung was thine ;

While all thy spirit marks his nervous line.

V.

But when, beyond this mortal bound
That spirit soar'd, with how divine a swell
From the deep hollow of thy mighty shell,

Rush'd the full tide of manly sound—

Rapt, fir'd, transported with th' unbounded lay,

The hearers thrill'd with holy ecstasy,

And in immortal pleasures died away.

Once more, oh ! HANDEL, to our aid descend,
That while the loud Hosannas we prolong,

Th' eternal Sire a gracious ear may lend,

Approve our raptures, and accept the song.

Here

Here slumber those whose active spirits soar'd
 Far as the utmost stretch of human thought ;
 Who knew all arts, all sciences explor'd,
 Now rang'd the stars and now the center sought.

The holy men who taught the aspiring soul
 On strong devotions eagle plume to rise ;
 Who knew the frantic passions to controul,
 And rais'd our grov'ling wishes to the skies.

What shade majestic glides yon isle along,
 Around whose head the rain-bow's glories stream ;
 His precepts strike with awe th' attendant throng,
 Who hang admiring on the lofty theme ?

'Tis NEWTON's self unfolds, in daring strain,
 The flaming tract which devious comets run ;
 Th' eternal laws that bind the ebbing main,
 And to the center fix the stedfast sun.

Shall CAMDEN sleep forgotten in the dust,
 Whose learned toil could from oblivion save ?

No ! grateful * Ifis decks his honour'd bust,
And pays that immortality he gave.

Oh ! could mine eye remotest ages pierce ;
Like thee, antiquity's dark page explore,
Full many a god-like chief should grace my verse,
Whose bones unhonour'd spread th' ennobled floor.

Hence, Superstition, with thy frantic din,
While SPRAT, while BARROW, faith's calm joys display,
With artful SOUTH—who knew the soul to win
From earth to heav'n, and shew'd the radiant way.

In PEARSE, humility and genius join'd,
The friend, the scholar, and the critic shone ;
Let ev'ry muse his bust with garlands bind,
And Learning her best patron's loss bemoan.

Illustrious KNELLER ! were thy pencil mine,
Mine the luxuriance of thy nobler vein ;
With bolder rage should rush the kindling line,
And in my song thy labours breathe again.

While

* The monument of this great father of British antiquities has lately been repaired and beautified at the expence of the University of Oxford, of which he was a member, and on which his productions reflect so much honour.

While Rubiliac inspires the glowing stone,
 And calls forth all the wonders of his art,
 In mute astonishment his pow'rs we own ;
 Nor check the sigh that heaves the bursting heart.

Hold, * Death, thy hand—that threaten'd stroke forbear—
 The stroke yon grief-struck husband would repell ;
 Whose eye distraction marks, whose front despair,
 Whose veins in agonizing horror swell !

Mark, as the tide of ebbing life retires,
 Thro' yon fair form what well-feign'd languors creep :
 While her fond, speechless lord in death admires,
 And clasps her sinking in eternal sleep.

But oh ! what muse, amidst the bold display
 Of art and genius which these glooms afford,
 Shall paint their efforts in as bold a lay,
 And all the grandeur of the scene record !

Forgive ye masters of each great design,
 If wond'ring awe her lips in silence close ;

The

* I need not here acquaint the reader that these stanzas allude to that most beautiful monument lately erected to the memory of Joseph Gascoigne Nightingale, Esq; and his Lady.

The arduous task her feeble powers decline :
Unequal to the daring theme she chose.

My startled ear what sound of horror greets ?
'Tis the dire night-bird, with her hideous cry—
Against yon arch her boding pinion beats ;
And to their graves the startled phantoms fly.

Stay, honour'd shadows of the wise and good !
No midnight plunderer I your haunts molest ;
No murderer's sacrilegious steps intrude
To violate the grave's eternal rest.

Oh ! point the way to that sequester'd spot
Where Britain's Bards my tearful homage claim :
A deeper horror shades each rising thought,
And wilder terrors shake my trembling frame.

Was that pale mass inform'd with heav'nly fire,
Genuis and wit is this your destin'd end ?
Favour'd of Phœbus, break thy useless lyre,
Thy steps already to the grave descend.

Ah !

Ah ! vain the poet's, like the painter's art :
 Fiction to truth resigns her flow'ry reign,
 Nor ought avail'd to ward the unerring dart,
 The loftiest fancy, or the sweetest strain.

Yet, stern Destroyer, vaunt not o'er their bier,
 Nor boast o'er art thy gloomy victory ;
 Tho' snatch'd by thee from all on earth held dear,
 How many millions have they snatch'd from thee !

Fain wou'd the muse recount each honour'd name,
 And with reflected lustre deck her page,
 Sing the bright sources whence she caught her flame,
 And, while she sings, aspire to kindred rage.

But ah ! they want no fame her skill can give,
 Their monuments sublimer trophies grace :
 They in their own immortal works survive,
 Nor can oblivion's rage those works deface.

Yet duteous will she pause at CHAUCER's shrine,
 And hail the hoary Sire of British verse :
 To paint each scene of metley life was thine,
 And many a jocund tale thy lays rehearse.

What tho' four centuries have obscur'd thy rhyme?
 Still lives each character thy pen pourtray'd:
 Thy numbers only feel the force of time,
 The features flourish, tho' the colours fade..

Soft o'er the dust of SPENSER let me tread,
 Whose gentle pipe beguil'd the shepherds hours,
 Or thro' the mazes of enchantment led,
 Thro' floods, and coral grots, and fairy bowers.

Sweet Bard! whom Mulla's widow'd tide deplores,
 Oh! skill'd to "lance" the heart with tender woe!
 How do the strains thy muse of sorrow pours,
 In kindred anguish melt us as they flow.

To see thee, by rebellion's lawless hand,
 From all the joys of love and friendship torn,
 Thy fields, the plunder of a barb'rous band,
 And oh! thyself the haughty * Burleigh's scorn.

Thee

* The Lord Treasurer Burleigh was the implacable enemy of Spenser whose hatred was further inflamed by some verses in which our author beautifully and feelingly describes the anxiety attending a dependance on Court favours.

Thee too she hails, alike misfortune's sport,
 Whose artful satire scourg'd a bigot race ;
 Lov'd, yet neglected, by a venal court,
 Its giddy monarch's favourite and disgrace.

Great * father of the British drama rise,
 Nor more with jealous fires disdainful burn ;
 Tho' Avon's loftier swan hath snatch'd the prize,
 Still no mean laurel shades thy honour'd urn.

Rise, and resume thy antient comic vein,
 As thro' thy muse's favourite haunts we stray :
 The sprightly COWLEY too our train shall join,
 And give to wit and love—the festive day.

Master of Nature ! who, with heav'n-taught skill,
 Knew ev'ry passion's secret spring to move ;
 With horror now the throbbing vein to chill,
 Now rouze to vengeance, and now warm to love :

Whether we hear thy artful Hamlet rave,
 Or frantic Lear his Tale of horror tell,
 With Ariel mount, or tempt the yawning cave
 Where hags of darkness chaunt the mutter'd spell.

Oh ! SHAKESPEAR, great in thy collective might,
 Beyond each antient's loftiest name renown'd ;
 Who shall pursue thee in thy daring flight ?
 Who trace those steps that spurn creation's bound ?

Cimmerian darkness shield me from the blaze
 Of glory, strong, ineffable—that flows
 From those bright * wheels that dart " pernicious rays,"
 And bear MESSIAH on his blasted foes ! .

What black dismay, what horrors shade each brow,
 But chief the Apostate's rebel soul appall ?
 As headlong down the yawning gulphs below
 They rush—while Chaos bellows in their fall.

With plume, like MILTON's, vigorous and sublime,
 By want forbid like MILTON to aspire,
 Lo ! DRYDEN, sweetest of the sons of rhyme,
 " Whose † song was music and whose breast a lyre,"

Like great DARIUS fall'n—while daring GRAY,
 Tho' last, not humblest of the lyric train,

Soars

* See Paradise Lost. Book 6.

† But man may justly tuneful strains admire,
 Whose soul is music and his breast a lyre.

DRYDEN.

Sqars in his mantle thro' the æthereal way,
Nor checks the fiery steed, but gives the loosen'd rein.

And ye, of meaner flame, and humbler wing,
Whose ashes strew this consecrated isle ;
Tho' dumb each voice, tho' tuneless ev'ry string,
Yet has the grave its charms, and death a smile.

The soul, that spurn'd on earth its kindred clay,
May now substantiate all its airy dreams,
Transported thro' its own Elyzium stray,
Taste nectar'd fruits, and quaff Nepenthean streams.

Sweet be your slumbers, as the lays ye sung,
Oh ! may no ruffian hands your shrines deface ;
'Till the great chords of nature be unstrung,
And one wide ruin whelm the sacred place.

'Till the archangel's awful trump shall sound,
And pour thro' nature the last loud alarms ;
Level yon lofty columns with the ground,
And from those breathing sculptures rend their charms,

I see the spectres of a thousand years,
Bards, sages, chiefs, in long procession rise—

In triumph mount above the burning spheres,
Impatient, Virtue, for thy dazzling prize.

The Immortals, bending from their thrones of light,
Smite their loud harps and hail th' ascending throng.

While to the heav'n of heav'ns they urge their flight,
Join the bright host and swell th' eternal song.

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